



NEWS RELEASE

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NEWS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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John Doe homicide victim ID'd after 43 years

SANTA ANA, Ca. (Nov. 7, 2023) – A John Doe homicide victim discovered 43 years ago in unincorporated North Orange County has been identified through investigative genetic genealogy.

In May 1980, skeletonized remains were recovered adjacent to an oil well in the unincorporated area of Tonner Canyon near the city of Brea. The investigation at the time determined the remains came from a black male, 17-24 years old, who had suffered a gunshot wound to the face.

Though investigators attempted to identify John Doe many times over the years, the case remained cold.

In December 2021, the Sheriff's Department was contacted by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) to conduct forensic investigative genetic genealogy to identify the victim.

John Doe was exhumed in May 2022 to obtain forensic specimens for genetic genealogy DNA analysis. In June 2022, Othram, a private forensic biotechnology company, stepped in to develop a DNA profile from the skeletal remains.

The DNA profile developed by Othram was then submitted to the Federal Bureau of Investigations Genealogy Team to attempt to identify John Doe.

The FBI identified several promising leads and OC Sheriff investigators began working to identify family members of John Doe. After months of work, investigators contacted a woman in Compton believed to be the mother of John Doe.

Using familial DNA samples, investigators in May 2023 identified the decedent as Lonnie Raymond Thomas, who was 20 years old at the time of his death.

Family members have been notified and Lonnie will be reinterred this week. OC Sheriff investigators also ordered a gravestone to mark his final resting place.

Sheriff's Department investigators now turn their focus to investigating the homicide case. Anyone with information related to this case is encouraged to contact Orange County Crime Stoppers at 1-855-TIP-OCCS or crimestoppers.org.



ORANGE COUNTY
SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT

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Lonnie Raymond Thomas